

VoiceNation Answers Avian Flu With Tips to Stay In Touch and Stay In Business

Pandemic warnings emphasize importance of communication planning.

Atlanta, GA (PRWEB) April 20, 2006 -- VoiceNation, the premier provider of <u>virtual voice solutions</u>, warns businesses to plan now for their communications needs in the event of a severe flu or pandemic.

Standard <u>business continuity planning</u> that anticipates short-term, local disruptions will provide little assistance if the United States faces an avian flu pandemic. The World Health Organization warns that large geographical areas may be quarantined in the event of a pandemic, making remote location of critical operations problematic. Additionally, flu epidemics typically come in waves, spreading the impact over weeks or months. As a result, business planning based on single, short-term events may be insufficient.

Perhaps more challenging than rethinking relocation and a quick return to business as usual are predictions of high absenteeism.

- A recent Gartner report encourages businesses to update their continuity plans using a 25-30% absenteeism rate.
- The International Monetary Fund predicts that absenteeism could reach 40% as a pandemic spreads.
- The Congressional Budget Office predicts that a severe pandemic could cost the economy \$600 billion in lost productivity.

With waves of disease, record levels of absenteeism could persist for months with rolling closures of transportation systems, schools, and businesses. Many of the absent will not be ill, simply unable to get to work. "Companies with a suddenly dispersed work force can continue to operate effectively with good communication planning," says Jay Reeder, CEO of <u>VoiceNation</u>. "Businesses can keep their employees informed as a crisis unfolds, maintain communications with customers and even continue to process orders with <u>automated phone services</u> and planning for remote communications—whether their employees are confined at home or quickly relocated. The good news is, businesses can protect their bottom lines with careful planning today."

Reeder recommends that business owners and continuity planners:

- Create policies and establish technology platforms that support employees working from home and remote processing of transactions
- Offer a 1-800 hotline for employees to stay informed about the business's status and expectations for employees as an epidemic unfolds
- Arrange teleconferencing facilities to maintain contact and work flow among staff, vendors, and customers
- Contract for automated call forwarding to enable customers and vendors to directly reach staff through the business's main line, even if no one's actually in the office.

For more tips, see the attached "Ten Tips for Staying in Touch and in Business" developed by VoiceNation or visit VoiceNation at www.voicenation.com.

For more information, contact: Graham C. Taylor Media Relations



1.866.766.5050, ext. 150

About VoiceNation

VoiceNation is committed to helping businesses succeed by providing creative cost-effective telephony solutions. VoiceNation provides outsourced <u>voicemail</u>, <u>Virtual PBX</u>, live answering, and <u>disaster recovery</u> services to businesses of all sizes throughout the United States.

Press Release by Write2Market

ADDITIONAL CONTENT FOR JOURNALISTS:

Ten Tips for Staying in Touch and Staying in Business During a Flu Pandemic

From VoiceNation

Traditional <u>business continuity</u> plans will fail in an avian flu pandemic. Restricted movement, quarantines and transportation failures could make moving everyone to a remote location unfeasible. Few plans in place today could successfully continue business operations for the flu's predicted duration of several months and absenteeism rates soaring to 40%. By rethinking business as well as their plans, business owners and crisis planners can take concrete steps today to keep their companies operational even under these unusual circumstances. A sound plan for an <u>avian flu</u> outbreak focuses on strong communication systems and policies.

VoiceNation offers companies ten tips for staying in touch and staying in business:

- 1. Establish a communications team responsible for ensuring your communications systems work through a pandemic. Develop more than one back up plan in case absenteeism or quarantines make one unworkable. Ensure your carrying capacity and that of your communication partners will accommodate a sudden, large load as companies switch to remote operations.
- 2. Create and publicize a communications plan. Critical elements include:
- -a schedule for releasing information in a crisis
- -contact information (land line, cell, satellite phone numbers and home email addresses) for all employees, key vendors and customers
- -established chain of communications
- -process for communicating business and employee status
- 3. Publicize a 1-800 hotline number that employees can use to receive updates so they know whether to come into work, how to contact their managers, what actions the company is taking, and when to return.
- 4. Create a dedicated website to communicate business status to employees, vendors and customers. A publicized web site can simplify notification to large groups and reduce load on phones and IT systems in a crisis. The web site can let customers know what services you can offer, any special conditions, and changes in your operations.
- 5. Offer remote access through a virtual private network to your employees. Ensure that managers and staff have access to the critical information and programs they need through secure systems. Consider managing pressure on your company servers by adopting multiple shifts.

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- 6. Expand on-line services to customers by automating as much of your business as possible. Even if your business is unaffected, your customers may be in quarantined areas and restricted to work they can do on-line.
- 7. Arrange for your phones to automatically transfer to an automated or live answering service that will route calls to cell phones, home phones or other locations. Customers and suppliers can still reach staff through your main number, regardless of their actual location.
- 8. Provide robust teleconferencing services to enable staff, customers and vendors to continue to work collaboratively without needing to meet.
- 9. Plan to forward faxes to another phone number or email address so you do not lose any incoming orders.
- 10. Contract with a company that can continue to take orders and requests for information for you as a back up. With Web forms and some training, remote operators can keep your business in business while your staff recovers from illness. The Department of Health and Human Services pandemic flu plan assumes that 20% of working adults will become ill in a pandemic.

Call VoiceNation to protect your business in a crisis. For disaster recovery planning and support for your organization, contact Joe Schiavone at 866-766-5050, extension 199.

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Contact Information
Graham C. Taylor
VoiceNation
http://www.voicenation.com
1-866-766-5050